

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

TOWN HALL RENOVATIONS PROJECT BUILDING COMMITTEE

July 7, 2014

Town Hall – Lower Level Conference Room L101

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

- I. Call to Order – Chairperson Castelle called the meeting to order at 5:05 PM.
- II. Roll Call – Members present: Clarke Castelle, Chairperson; Daniel Dinunzio, Paul Vessella, Bill DeBlasio, and Jen Win-Johnson. Others present: Members of the public; Stephen Woods, Mayor; John Salomone, Town Manager; Ed Moriarty, Downes Construction Company; Lou Jachimowicz, Chief Finance and Operations Officer; and Jeff Baron, Director of Administrative Services.
- III. Public Participation – Bob Gai, 137 Lamp Lighter Lane. He is a native of Newington and has lived in Town for 69 years. He has been active in Town. A third generation of his family is currently in the Newington school system. He saw the article in the paper. He believes that two things, education and recreation, give a town character and vitality. He was there at the start of a lot of the recreation programs that they have today. Recreation is important. He was also a corporate Vice President at Aetna. In his job there he recognized that the professionals knew more about their area of expertise than he did. He would ask questions and control the purse strings. He was frustrated by the article he saw in the paper. Recreation brings and keeps people in Newington. The gym was built in 1950 and it is dilapidated. In the past he also has volunteered at the Teen Center, which was located in the dungeon near the boiler room. He hopes there is the right type of facility for teens in the proposed Community Center.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive. She encouraged public participants to be courteous to the Building Committee members. No Building Committee member here voted for the location of the Community Center. Some have voted on having a separate building. Those Building Committee members that are here tonight voted on the final design and the amount to be bonded. The Building Committee did what it thought was right. When they were presented all schemes led to putting the new building at the soccer fields. There are two opportunities for public participation at each meeting. Those who are speaking out now could have spoken out then. The process bothers her. She read from the minutes of the January 13, 2014 meeting regarding statements

by Bob MacDonald of Downes Construction regarding public work shops. She feels the public was not part of the process until the public hearing.

- IV. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes – No action was taken.
- V. Discuss and Take Action on Public Hearing Comments – Mr. Castle would like to give a formal response to the Town Council regarding the public hearing comments. The purpose of the meeting is to review with the Building Committee what he proposes to say. The Chair referred to his notes and the minutes in preparing his document, which he read into the record. It is as follows:

1. Why doesn't the referendum offer a choice between a Plan A (renovation of Town Hall and construction of a new Community Center separate from Town Hall); and a Plan B (renovation of Town Hall and the current Community Center within the Town Hall complex)?

A single Plan--Renovation of Town Hall and construction of a new stand-alone Community Center--has been the object of this Committee since it met for the second time in its present form on February 21st, 2012. At that meeting, the committee resolved by consensus that it was interested in moving the Community Center to a new location.

The rationale for doing so was the following:

--Renovations on site would require the gym to be closed for a year or more--probably for two winters--forcing cancellation of the intramural (travel) basketball program, as well as the volleyball, badminton, dance and exercise programs now held in the Community Center during that time.

--The current space does not meet the present and future recreational interests and needs of the community. After examining the site, the Building Committee determined there is not sufficient space to build the additional facilities needed, either adjacent to the current Town Hall or on the other side of Mazzocchi Way.

--Much of the space that will be vacated by the Parks and Recreation Department is intended to accommodate swing space while sections of the Town Hall are being renovated. This will allow each department to remain open and conduct the Town's business during reconstruction of its own office space.

--This same space, vacated by Parks and Recreation, is necessary for the expansion of office and storage space of the departments that remain in Town Hall. The primary beneficiary would be the Human Services Department, so that

residents who utilize its services will find a more private and accommodating setting.

With these thoughts in mind, a formal vote was taken on July 17, 2012, to build a separate community center as part of the Town Hall Renovation project, passing with three out of four members present in favor.

On January 7, 2013, after a lengthy review and selection process that began on October 1, 2012, a motion to accept the site at Willard and Cross Streets passed unanimously (6-0).

The motion to approve this single plan, and recommend it to the Town Council, was made and passed unanimously on April 28, 2014.

2. What are the potential environmental impacts on the neighboring wetlands, brook, pond and water fall?

Following passage of the referendum, the project will be referred to the Inland Wetlands Commission for review. That body would assess potential environmental impacts, and propose necessary measures to protect wetland areas during and after construction, exactly as they did following the referendum that approved bonding for the new Police headquarters, and prior to work beginning on the synthetic turf field at Clem Lemire Park.

3. Why are we choosing to build the new Community Center where the youth soccer fields are now located?

After several months of deliberations, during which nine different options were evaluated, the Committee determined that the location at the intersection of Cross and Willard was the one that best served the interests of the Town. Committee members and staff saw this area as outdoor recreational space that could be converted into mostly indoor space for similar purposes, and voted 6-0 in its favor.

Since that date, the site of the new community center has been central to the Committee's plans, and has not been a subject of internal debate. It also took into consideration that, although not the object of the current referendum, the Town's formal long-term plan includes renovation of a pool, and possible removal of the bath house and other structures on the banks of Mill Pond, to be replaced by the locker rooms in the new Center. The central area of the Park around Mill Pond could thereby revert to its more natural state.

4. How can the Committee justify borrowing 30,000,000 to pay for this project?

The cost of the project is a reflection of its scope—primarily the need to replace nearly all mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems in the current Town Hall, including the roof.

A fully renovated Town Hall will be an attractive and safe space for both Public and Staff—the front parlor of the Community, fully ADA compliant, safe, and easy to access—a proper environment in which to conduct business with the Town.

The new Community Center will accommodate the expansion of existing programs, as well as new programs to be developed by the Parks and Recreation Department in accordance with community interest.

A maximum debt of \$ 30,000,000 is a relatively modest figure for a Town the size of Newington, with a Grand List of \$2,500,000,000. With Town revenue estimated to be approximately \$87,000,000, the maximum annual debt service projected of \$ 3,400,000 is well within accepted norms, and can be accommodated within the \$ 6,300,000 that the Town customarily budgets annually for debt service and pay-as-you-go projects.

The Chair stated that Mrs. Cohen was unable to attend the meeting. He asked the rest of the Committee if they had any alterations they would like to see. Mr. Dinunzio spoke to question number four, on borrowing. There has been turnover on the Committee. Former Chairperson Scott McBride had said that plans could change based on the cost. Mr. Dinunzio also asked about the soccer fields, if the Community Center were built there, he had heard that fireworks during the Extravaganza could not be lit within 500 feet of a building. What would the impact of a building there be on the Extravaganza? Mr. Salomone responded that there were no restrictions on using the proposed parking area for the fireworks. The building could not be occupied. There would be no restrictions on the fireworks. Mill Pond Bathhouse is currently within 500 feet of where the fireworks are lit now. The Extravaganza would not be impeded. The Chair responded to the cost, to say that the cost for the Community Center remained the same, but the cost for the Town Hall renovations increased during the course of the Committee's deliberations.

Mr. DeBlasio spoke to question number 1. The High School uses the Community Center every day after school. These are adult sized kids, not just small children. The Community Center is the backup for the High School for different sports.

The Town Manager responded to a comment that was made during the public hearing as to why there was not a more detailed budget. There was an extensive budget, broken down to individual unit costs. The Town Council dedicated three meetings to talk about the Town Hall project and the detailed budget was covered. The night of the public hearing, he only had a limited

time to make a presentation and did not get into the extended level of budget detail. Mr. Salomone also offered to establish an electronic forum to answer questions in real time and have the responses shared with others. Mrs. Win-Johnson stated her preference for one “go to” place where drawings would be posted, along with frequently asked questions. Mr. Salomone noted that frequently asked questions will appear in the mailer that is being reviewed by the State Election Commission. He must be neutral, he can’t be an advocate. He can answer questions asked of him, which is why he is proposing the electronic forum.

Mr. Castelle will address the questions before the Town Council the following evening. He relied on his notes and the minutes in an attempt to accurately portray what was asked for. Mrs. Win-Johnson liked the question and answer format and asked how to get this information out to the public. Mr. Vessella asked if the website was developed, will all the questions be posted and would all the answers be available to be viewed? Mr. Salomone responded that they will. Town Councilors can also comment when this matter comes up the following evening. The Committee had no other suggested changes to Mr. Castelle’s document.

- VI. Other Business Pertinent to the Committee – Mr. Dinunzio noted that September 9th was a half day for the schools. Would there be an impact on the polling locations? Mr. Salomone and Mr. Jachimowicz responded. The schools know the date. No conflicts have been identified. No issues are expected at Martin Kellogg Middle School with their construction. Mr. Jachimowicz will speak with Dr. Collins regarding school buses and their impact on access.
- VII. Public Participation – Bryan Groves, 127 Chestnut Road. He agrees that you need a good Town Hall and a good Community Center. He was wondering about the location. For the Community Center, what is the future for the recycling center next to Churchill Park? Mr. Salomone was asked by the Chair to respond. There are restrictions on developing a landfill for a number of years after it closes. It was not considered as a potential site for the Community Center. The landfill is not closed yet. The site can be used as passive open space after the landfill closes. It is more difficult to put structures on the land. The landfill will close in the next three to five years. Mr. Groves said he agreed that you needed a presentable Town Hall. He asked who owned the parcel of land in the center of town. The parcel he asked about is owned by the Children’s Hospital. He wanted to present these locations as ideas to think about.

Jeff Zelek, 55 Welles Drive North. He asked who determines the content of the mailer. He recommended giving the public an opportunity to review the mailer before it was sent out, to allow for neutrality. Mr. Salomone was asked to respond. The flyer is drafted by Town staff and edited by the bond attorney.

It will also be submitted to the State Elections Commission. It would not be reasonable to have a Town Committee review it in the manner recommended.

Gail Budrejko, 21 Isabelle Terrace. She is speaking to the second question, on environmental concerns. She noted that the project would be referred to the Conservation Commission following passage of the referendum. If the environmental damage is substantial, whose definition of substantial would it be and if it were substantial, could the project be stopped? Mr. Salomone responded that it would be brought to them when the site plan is completed. It will follow the same process as any other project, Town or private, once design is finalized.

Gary Bolles, 28 Burden Lane. His comments were read and given to Mr. Baron for inclusion in the minutes in their entirety. They are as follows:

In regards to your proposal to construct the new Parks and Recreation Center at the corner of Cross Street and Willard Avenue, there is a critical piece of information that I don't think the Committee has. I'm going to give this to you by the numbers. 1. The proposal, if approved, would build the new Parks and Recreation center on wetlands. 2. According to the State of Connecticut definition of a wetland, Connecticut only requires that there only be Hydric Soils. 3. Hydric Soil is soil which is permanently or seasonally saturated by water, resulting in anaerobic conditions, as found in wetlands. (Anaerobic means involving an absence of free oxygen.) 4. By physical observation over the years and through documentation on the Town level and State level, the area on which the Center is to be built is definitively hydric soil. 5. Despite the Town's efforts to modify the wetlands in the proposed area over the years, once a wetland always a wetland. 6. The EPA has determined that all streams and their associated wetlands need to be preserved and protected. 7. They have just recently announced a new rule that covers all associated wetlands that are connected to existing streams and other bodies of water; not just navigable waters. 8. The new rule preserves vital safeguards for these wetlands. 9. We would not want to begin building or disturbing this land without the proper State and Federal permits, not to mention our own Conservation Commission. 10. This Committee should not approve any application or proceed with any further discussion until a thorough investigation is completed into whether the Town of Newington is acting contrary to law either through negligence, ignorance, or deliberate indifference to our existing wetlands. In conclusion, if you weren't aware of the points of information that I've just enumerated to you, now you know, and furthermore, nobody can claim they didn't know.

Roy Zartarian, 25 Stuart Street. He shares the serious concerns of the earlier speakers about the environmental impact, but is not here to speak on that. He asked what the cost is to operate the Community Center once it is constructed. He is also asking how much this new budgetary element will impact taxes, for

cleaning, repairs, etc. Is a solar capability designed and included? This would be a good opportunity to install solar energy.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive. Many nights the project was discussed by the Committee and also presented to the Town Council. This was not a public dialogue, there was no give and take. There is still no Plan B. Part of the rationale for putting the building in the park was that the Committee was told they could always revisit the subject. The Committee would have been better served (more continuity) if there had been residents on it. She is very disappointed in the participation of the residents before now. When the various schemes were discussed there was a lack of public input. Not all questions were answered. If she had known the effect that electronic media would have she would have asked to have this on Facebook two years ago. As to how the question on the referendum is being asked, it needs to be clear what the electorate is voting on.

Judy Igielski, 23 Old Musket Drive. She has heard bits and pieces on the Town Hall and Parks and Recreation building. She is not speaking as a member of any group. From her experience on the Board of Education, the Committee can't answer questions and must refer to the flyer mailed out by the Town. One member can't speak for the Committee. If Parks and Recreation uses a private cleaning service, what will be the cost per square foot? If you are voting on a referendum of \$30,000,000, what happens if the cost goes up? You may find things you didn't expect. People lead busy lives, don't fault those who didn't come to earlier meetings. Keep as much in the media as you can. At some point we will reach a limit as to what we can offer our residents. She thanked those who have served on the Committee, and also Mr. Castelle and Mr. McBride for serving as Chairpersons of the Committee.

Don Woods, 82 Ivy Lane. He is speaking as Chairman of the Board of Parks and Recreation. He is here to answer some questions. He wants the project to go forward and for all to be happy. He met with the soccer board on May 20th and identified two areas that could replace the fields that would be lost if the new Community Center went in the park. He also asked for a list of concerns and priorities from them. The Town doesn't want to renovate the existing Community Center, as 16,000 square feet is not adequate for the needs of the Town. As to open space, Newington is 92% developed. What makes up the remaining 8%? The 92% includes schools, parks and cemeteries, so putting the building in the park would not be taking open space. He identified the location of the current 26 soccer fields in Newington. He analyzed the open green space in Mill Pond Park on a square footage basis. If the new Community Center were constructed there, it would occupy only 6.5% of this space. He looks at the space in Mill Pond Park as recreational space, space that is proposed to go from soccer only to use for a twelve month period. He hopes that all parties are treated fairly.

Tom Bowen, 22 Woods Way. He is speaking as a member of the soccer board. He takes great offense at how the Chairman of the Board of Parks and Recreation portrayed the soccer board. The soccer board voiced their concerns to the Parks and Recreation Board. The soccer board had a major tournament on Fathers Day and has not held a meeting since their meeting with the Parks and Recreation Board representatives. The 16,000 square feet in Town Hall doesn't include the other gyms in town. Only two communities (the City of Hartford and the Town of Manchester) in the Hartford region are more densely developed than Newington. The soccer board is composed of volunteers and offers over 700 children the opportunity to recreate. The primary use of the artificial turf field is football in the fall and lacrosse in the spring. The soccer club does have concerns about this project. He takes offense to the Board of Parks and Recreation Chairman's comments on the soccer club.

Patty Foley, 51 Crownridge. She took a half day off from work to be here. It is difficult for those with children to attend. This is a new age for information. NCTV are volunteers and broadcasts what they can. The public needs things up quicker and easier.

Alison Clarke, 25 Wilbur Drive. She thanked the Building Committee for their hard work. She is upset at losing open space. She looked at the meeting minutes to where the decision on the Community Center site was made. They didn't say why this site was selected. There was not enough on why the Committee felt this was the best site.

Cathy Zolad, 269 Candlewyck Drive. She is President of the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association. The meeting between the soccer club and the Board of Parks and Recreation was a productive one. She understands that the soccer club volunteers had a busy schedule. She feels there will be a suitable replacement area for the kids to play.

- VIII. Response to Public Participation – The Chairperson noted that former Chairperson Scott McBride tried to respond to public participation. He hoped that the meeting had been useful
- IX. Adjournment – the meeting adjourned at 6:46 PM.